

September 17, 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: AIS Observers

FROM: David C. Potter
Branch Chief, FSB

SUBJECT: Marine Mammal Transit Watches

This memo is to inform observers of a change in Northeast Fisheries Observer Program protocols. As of September, 2003, Observers are **NO LONGER** required to conduct Marine Mammal Transit Watches. This change in protocol will cancel transit watches to or from the fishing grounds and between fishing sites for gillnet, pelagic pair trawl, foreign and joint venture, and purse seine trips.

Observers should continue collection of opportunistic (off-effort) sightings of marine mammals, sea turtles and debris and should continue to record those sightings on the Marine Mammal, Sea Turtle, and Debris Sighting Log. All off-effort sightings must continue to be accompanied by detailed comments, as indicated in the Observer Manual. In addition, observers must continue marine mammal haul watches on limited gillnet trips. This change in protocol will not affect the recording of incidental take data.

Upon examination of the data collected during transit watches, it was determined that visibility is often too poor to efficiently survey for marine mammals and sea turtles while the vessel is in transit. The Fisheries Sampling Branch, in consultation with the Protected Species Branch, weighed the value of the information being collected, in relation to other observer duties, and has decided to suspend the collection of transit watch data.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this change in protocol please contact Sara Quinn (Sara.Quinn@noaa.gov) / (508) 495-2227.

Your cooperation is appreciated.

Thank you.